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AUTHOR Dixon, George
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ABSTRACT

This brief booklet examines the issue of how to ensure that one gets the best possible return out of attending a human resources or human resources development and training conference. The first section discusses evaluating seminars, expos, and professional conferences and the rationale for attending. A four-year conference planning calendar lists offerings of human resource development (HRD) organizations. Next, suggestions are offered for evaluating the conference flyers, brochures, and catalogs the HR or HRD professional receives. These aspects of the brochure are discussed: clear descriptions, length, type of learning, limited or unlimited session attendance, repeat sessions, networking opportunities, expo visits, and guarantee policy. Next, the brochure addresses preparing oneself to attend a conference. A sample conference planning summary is provided. A section on tips on attending suggests building in participation, using the experts as personal consultants, note-taking and managing information, and networking. Tips are also offered for making the most of an expo. The final section discusses ways to reinforce what one learns at conferences. (YLB)

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ATTENDING CONFERENCES & EXPOS

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Carolyn Balling

Director, HRD, Amex Life Assurance

Christine Chriscoe

Manager, T&D, Coca Cola USA

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Dean, McDonald's Hamburger University

Patricia Lambert

Training Manager, GTE Government Systems

Frank Marmo

Manager, Employee Development and Training,
City of Atlanta

Sue Rye

Manager, HRD, Walt Disney World.

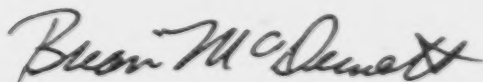
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WHY THIS BOOKLET?

Conferences and expositions offer some of the best opportunities for training and human resources development professionals to do for themselves what they do so well for others—to design learning activities to meet specific developmental needs. Some jarring statistics show, however, that trainers may not be making the best use of what's available, an irony that *The Training Directors' Forum Guide to Attending Conferences & Expos* is designed to help address.

Subscribers to the *Training Directors' Forum Newsletter* revealed that development of the training staff is not a high priority budget item in nearly half of the training organizations represented in a 1988 survey. That's a breach of the well-founded advice to practice what is preached, which no doubt can be rationalized away in the same fashion many non-training managers can shrug off the most convincing cases for staff development—schedules are too tight, workloads are too heavy, funds too precious. But a second survey, conducted specifically for this guide, showed that nine out of 10 of the respondents attend at least one training/human resources development conference a year (nearly four out of 10 attend three or more), and on average find that almost 40 percent of the time spent at conferences is not especially useful.

Our hope is that this guide—published by the Training Directors' Forum as a service to the training community—can help you make better use of the time you spend at professional conferences.



Brian McDermott

Editor, *Training Directors' Forum Newsletter*

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ATTENDING A CONFERENCE

When you attend a human resources or human resources development and training conference, what's at stake? You may be making, after all, a sizeable investment of time and money. How do you ensure you get the best possible return on that investment?

This brief booklet examines those questions. It's told from the perspectives of conference participants, including several hundred readers of *The Training Directors' Forum Newsletter* who were recently polled on how they get the most out HRD conferences, what conditions lead to a profitable experience and why conferences fail to live up to expectations. This booklet also suggests ways to adapt what some human resources development professionals call "expert participation" to attending a conference.

Such an approach may take a little planning, but the added return you and your organization will see on your conference investment makes the effort worth it.

Evaluating the Scene

First a few distinctions. It has been estimated that over 100,000 half-day, full-day and two- to three-day seminar programs are offered each year in the U.S. by hundreds of vendors, consultants, professional associations and academic institutions. Usually such programs will address a very specific issue or focus on a narrow range of issues. Costs run from less than \$100 for short, more general programs to many times that for longer or more specialized programs.

A second category, expos, allows companies to exhibit their industry-specific products and services to customers under one roof—usually a very big one. While forums, workshops and presentations may accompany the activities, the main focus is on the exposition floor.

Major professional conferences may combine elements of both seminar programs and expos. Frequently held over a two- to five-day period and offering dozens or even hundreds of sessions and workshops, major conferences can be exciting, productive and overwhelming. A major conference will feature dozens of experts, many of them among the best known practitioners, consultants and teachers in their fields. A major conference will also

feature numerous special events, speeches, presentations, networking and socializing opportunities. Some annual HR and HRD conferences, including several of those listed on pages 7-9, attract thousands of participants.

The combined business of seminar programs, expos and conferences thrives because continuing professional development has become a permanent fixture among U.S. corporations. And as the pace of change continues to accelerate in today's business world, the role of these off-site learning events is expected to become even more important.

Why Go?

A major human resources conference presents the well-prepared professional with a multitude of opportunities. *Training Directors' Forum Newsletter* readers rank the usefulness and timeliness of information presented at sessions and workshops (especially when it can be related to job and career objectives), the opportunities to meet, network and "troubleshoot" with colleagues and peers, and the chance to see the "big picture" on where the field is heading as among their most important objectives. Frequently, "recharging batteries" is another desired result.

Plus, if an exposition of products and services is attached to a conference, conference goers have the opportunity to compare and evaluate vendors quickly and efficiently. Learning from the experiences other participants have had dealing with vendors can be especially revealing. Duplicating the experience could take hundreds of hours outside the expo area—if it were possible at all.

The presence of so much professional expertise presents another unique opportunity. Session and workshop leaders may consult to businesses for fees that range from \$1,000 to \$2,500 a day and up. At a conference, you have access to them for the comparatively modest conference fee. If you take full advantage of the opportunity, you can ask them to consult on your own specific organizational or professional needs. In this sense, a conference may represent one of the greatest professional bargains you'll ever encounter.

4-YEAR CONFERENCE PLANNING CALENDAR

ASSOCIATION	1988	1989	1990	1991
American Management Associations (AMA) (HR Conference) 135 W. 50th St. New York, NY 10020 Contact: Phyllis White (212) 903-8234		April 26-28 Opryland Hotel Nashville	April 23-25 Hilton Hotel San Francisco	April 15-17 Marriott World Center Orlando
American Society for Healthcare Education and Training (ASHET) 840 N. Lake Shore Drive Chicago, IL 60611 Contact: Margie Munillo (312) 280-6113 Exhibit: Bob Buccola (312) 280-6113	June 19-22 Adam's Mark St. Louis	June 8-13 Chicago Marriott (Downtown) Chicago	June 9-12 Marriott World Center Orlando	June Omni Sheraton Washington, DC (tentative)
American Society for Personnel Admin. (ASPA) 606 N. Washington St. Alexandria, VA 22314 Contact: Alec Des Roches (703) 548-3440	June 26-29 Moscone Convention Center San Francisco	June 25-28 Hynes Convention Center Boston	June 24-27 Georgia World Congress Center Atlanta	June 23-26 Cincinnati Convention Center Cincinnati
American Society for Training & Development (ASTD) Nat'l Conf.	May 22-27 Dallas Convention Center Dallas	June 4-9 Hynes Convention Center Boston	May 6-11 Orange County Civic Center Orlando	May 19-24 Moscone Convention Center San Francisco
ASTD Technical Skills Training Conference ASTD 1630 Duke St., Box 1443 Alexandria, VA 22313 Contact: Betty Smith (703) 683-8100 Exhibits: Virginia Artis (703) 683-8100	Nov 30-Dec 2 Indiana Convention Center & Hoosier Dome Indianapolis	Dates not set	Dates not set	Dates not set
Assoc for Educational Comm. & Tech. (AECT) 1126-16th St. NW Washington, DC 20036 Contact: Lois Freeland (202) 466-4780		Feb 2-6 Dallas Convention Center Dallas	Jan 31-Feb 4 Anaheim Convention Center Anaheim	Feb 14-18 Orlando Convention Center Orlando

ASSOCIATION	1988	1989	1990	1991
Association for Quality and Participation (AQP) formerly International Assoc. of Quality Circles (IAQC) 801-B W. Eighth St., Ste. 301 Cincinnati, OH 45203 Contact: Carol Perlstein (513) 381-1959		May 1-4 Kansas City Convention Center Kansas City, MO	April 23-26 Albert Sabin Convention Center Cincinnati	April 22-25 St. Louis
COMMTEx (Communications Technology International) Sponsored by Assoc. for Educational Communications & Technology (AECT) and International Communications Industries Association (ICIA) Contact: Janet Bray (703) 273-7200		Feb 3-5 Hyatt Regency Dallas	Feb 1-3 Hilton & Towers Anaheim	Jan 15-17 Peabody Orlando Orlando
Human Resource Planning Society (HRPS) P.O. Box 2553, Grand Central Stat. New York, NY 10163 Contact: Joy Ann Buss (212) 490-6387		April 2-5 Princess Hotel Scottsdale	Spring Ritz-Carlton Naples, FL	Dates not set
International Communications Industries Association (ICIA) 3150 Spring St. Fairfax, VA 22031 Contact: Janet Bray (703) 273-7200		Feb 2-5 Hyatt Regency Dallas	Feb 1-3 Hilton & Towers Anaheim	Jan 15-17 Peabody Orlando Orlando
International Federation of Training and Development Organizations (IFTDO) 7 Westbourne Rd. Southport PR8 2HZ ENGLAND Contact: Derek Wake (44) (704) 67994	Aug 29-Sept 1 Keio Plaza Intercontinental Hotel Tokyo	July 3-6 Barbazon Conference Center London	July 4-6 London	Dates not set
National Society for Performance and Instruction (NSPI) 1126-16th St. NW, Ste. 102 Washington, DC 20036 Contact: Paul Tremper (202) 861-0777		Mar 27-Apr 1 Marriott Denver	Mar 25-30 Sheraton Centre Toronto, Ontario	Spring Los Angeles

ASSOCIATION	1988	1989	1990	1991
National Society of Sales Training Executives (NSSTE) 1040 Woodcock Road Orlando, FL 32803 Contact: Charles Harper (305) 984-8312	June 19-22 Le Meridien San Francisco	June 25-28 Radisson So. Minneapolis	June 24-27 Crystal Gateway Marriott Arlington	Dates not set
	Dec 4-7 Marriott Marco Island Marco Island, FL	Nov 26-29 Colonial Williamsburg Williamsburg	Nov 25-28 Hilton Walt Disney World Village Lake Buena Vista, FL	Dates not set
Organization Development Network (ODN) PO Box 44A Northwood, NH 03261 Contact: Thom Chase (603) 942-8189	Oct 30-Nov 3 Boston Park Plaza Boston	Nov 5-9 Omni San Diego	Sept 22-27 Windom Franklin Hotel Philadelphia	October Los Angeles
Society for Technical Communication (STC) 815 15th St. N.W., Ste. 400 Washington, DC 20005 Contact: William C. Stolgitis (202) 737-0035		May 14-17 Marriott Chicago	May 20-23 San Jose Convention Center San Jose	May 12-15 New York Hilton New York
Lakewood Conferences TRAINING DIRECTORS' FORUM	June 12-15 Boca Raton Hotel & Club Boca Raton, FL	June 17-24 East Coast	June 3-7 East Coast	Early Summer East Coast
COST-EFFECTIVE TRAINING CONFERENCE	July 18-20 Four Seasons Inn on the Park Toronto, Ontario	Mid Summer Toronto	Mid Summer Toronto	Mid Summer Toronto
	Aug 15-17 San Diego Marriott Hotel and Marina San Diego	Late Summer San Diego	Late Summer San Diego	Late Summer San Diego
	Sept 19-21 Ambassador West Hotel Chicago	Early Fall Chicago	Early Fall Chicago	Early Fall Chicago
TRAINING/PERSONNEL Conference and Expo sponsored by TRAINING Magazine and PERSONNEL JOURNAL c/o Lakewood Publications Inc. 50 South Ninth Street Minneapolis, MN 55402 Contact: John Hedren (612) 333-0471	Dec 12-16 Jacob Javits Convention Center New York	Dec 4-8 Jacob Javits Convention Center New York	December Jacob Javits Convention Center New York	December Jacob Javits Convention Center New York
	Exhibits: Don Engebretson (612) 333-0471			

CONFERENCES: A CONSUMER'S GUIDE

The same excitement and multitude of opportunities found at many conferences can create a number of potential pitfalls.

■ *What do you do when confronted with a thick conference catalog, for example, that may offer hundreds of courses and dozens of events?*

■ *How do you create a personal learning agenda without getting overwhelmed by the sheer amount of opportunities offered?*

■ *How do you determine the quality of the conference program and the credibility of its sponsor? How can you match learning levels, presentation styles, and related factors that influence how a session unfolds with your own needs or preferences?*

If you're a typical HR or HRD professional, you'll encounter numerous conference flyers, brochures and catalogs during the year. They may contain the answers to some of those questions. When evaluating conference literature, look for:

Clear Descriptions

■ *Are learning objectives for sessions clearly stated?*

■ *Do they match your own objectives? (Assuming you have them—more on that later.)*

■ *Do session descriptions tell you how much information will be presented, what experience or knowledge level is expected and what results can you expect?*

■ *Are the credentials of session presenters expanded beyond a one-line job title or company affiliation?*

None of these are frivolous questions. *Training Directors' Forum Newsletter* readers report that inaccurate (or even misleading) session descriptions, failure to specify learning objectives, plus inadequate information about the backgrounds of session leaders ("being a subject matter expert isn't enough," one reader warns) are the main areas that needed improvement at conferences they've attended.

Many newsletter readers report they've learned from experience to phone conference sponsors for more information when they're not satisfied with session descriptions. The sponsor won't (or shouldn't) view your contact as an intrusion. The sponsor should also encourage you to contact the session leader directly.

Length

How long are sessions? One hour? Two? Longer?

Shorter sessions may work well for overviews or surveys, but with sessions that promise to cover a lot of specific ground in great detail, shorter sessions may force presenters to skim over information that deserves to be treated more fully. Shorter sessions can also sometimes eliminate the possibility of a useful question and answer period.

Both limitations may reduce your ability to relate the information to specific job or career objectives. As a result, session length is one factor to consider when you're determining the potential usefulness of sessions.

The Type of Learning

Is the methodology employed in sessions clearly described and does it match your preferred learning style?

When you select a session topic, you're also selecting the way it is presented. You may prefer a formal lecture. Or you may find 'experiential' types of learning more useful. As with inappropriate session lengths, if you are uncomfortable with the way information is presented, it may limit your ability to learn.

Limited or Unlimited Session Attendance

Are sessions limited to those who register for them, or are sessions open to all?

The distinction can make a difference. Attendance by limited registration allows conference sponsors to control the size of sessions. Conference sponsors make every effort to match room facilities with the expected number of participants, but sometimes a room designed for 50 may end up with 150 or more—outstripping the handouts,

the ability of audio/visuals to be seen and heard by all, and the ability of participants to question or interact with the presenter.

Limited attendance may also attract participants who are more committed to getting results. It also limits "session hoppers" who wander in and out of sessions, distracting both presenters and participants alike. Finally, pre-registration allows you to contact session leaders in advance on specific areas of interest.

On the other hand, limited attendance may hamper your flexibility. Your objectives may include gaining a breadth of information rather than depth in a few limited areas. You may want the ability to explore new or unexpected areas with ease. Besides, if you're dissatisfied with the quality of a session, you can leave before you've wasted much time—without the need to arrange for a refund or a substitute session. Just make sure, one newsletter reader warns, "to have a list of alternatives when sessions bomb."

Repeat Sessions

Are some sessions offered more than once?

As you create a participation plan ahead of time, you may frequently run into scheduling conflicts. Repeat sessions can make session planning easier.

Networking Opportunities

What formal or informal programs and opportunities has the sponsor arranged to enhance networking with your peers?

To some conference participants, networking is as important as formal conference programs. Look for structured opportunities to get together with colleagues, from both within your industry and outside it. The cross-fertilization of ideas made possible by the latter can substantially widen your professional perspective and possibly enhance your job performance.

Expo Visits

If an exposition of products and services is an important part of a conference, is the conference schedule flexible enough to allow ample time to visit it?

There are various ways to make the most of an expo visit (see pages 23-25). Sessions should be scheduled to make such visits easy.

In Case You're Dissatisfied

Does the sponsor have a clearly-stated guarantee policy?

What provisions are made if you feel one or more sessions fail to meet your expectations? Guarantees may include refunds, another session or credit for next year's conference. Just make sure you understand the sponsor's policy when you register.

Conference Consumer's Checklist

1. Clear session descriptions.
2. Session length seems adequate to cover objectives.
3. Learning methods explained and acceptable.
4. Matches your preferences for limited attendance or session sampling.
5. Sessions repeated.
6. Adequate networking opportunities.
7. Convenient expo hours.
8. Satisfaction guaranteed.

GETTING READY

A lot has been written about the seminar learning experience and the conditions that lead to successful learning transfer. Most experts agree that both program leaders and participants are jointly responsible for getting results. Many argue that it's *the participants themselves* who bear most of the responsibility for how successfully they learn at public seminars and conferences. Moreover, success is frequently a matter of what you do before you get there.

Identifying Issues: What Do You Need To Learn?

An active planning process probably isn't a requirement for conference attendance; given the wealth of information available at most conferences, picking up useful information is probably inevitable.

But if you do take an active approach to planning, you'll maximize your own and your company's investment. And by showing a potential return on investment beforehand, you'll be able to more easily justify the expense of attending.

Considerations...

Thinking in terms of both yourself and your company, what are your deficiencies or biggest needs?

What areas do you want to improve, fix, change?

What near-term and long-term developments do you anticipate, for both your organization and your career, and what responses will be required of you?

A Few Suggestions for Setting Objectives:

- Preview conference sessions and match them to your needs. That includes identifying critical career and organizational issues and pairing them with potential benefits from specific sessions.
- Involve others who have a stake in developing a par-

ticipation plan. They may include anyone who may be changed by what you learn at a conference—from co-workers to your supervisors and managers.

Patricia A. McLagan, in her *Getting Results Through Learning: Tips for Participants in Workshops and Conferences* (McLagan & Associates, St. Paul, MN), points out that "involvement in planning for change leads to greater commitment to implementing change later on."

McLagan suggests asking yourself:

- Who may have an interest in the topics or skills a conference program addresses?
- Who controls the resources you may need later on to put new ideas to work?
- Who will be affected in a major way by change?
- Who has information that may make your goal setting more realistic?
- Who must agree to or approve any potential changes conference attendance may bring about?

Finally, create a conference participation plan that:

- Selects sessions you'll attend.
- Identifies the people and resources who will be available during each session.
- Identifies the major personal and job issues you'll "trouble shoot" throughout the program. (Many *Training Directors' Forum Newsletter* readers report they write down a series of from three to 10 key questions they hope every session will address. They use those questions for followup during Q&A periods and individually with session leaders after the session has formally ended.)

SAMPLE CONFERENCE PLANNING SUMMARY

I. NEED/ISSUE
(Personal/Organizational)
Description:

Near-term goal:

Longer-term goal:

What I need to learn/do:

II. POSSIBLE SESSION THAT ADDRESSES NEED Content:

Specific learning benefits/results promised:

Match with near- or long-term goal?

Does this session correspond to other actions I'm /my
company is taking?

Learning Objectives: What on-the-job activities will use
this planned learning? What performance indicators will
measure this new knowledge or skill?

III. OTHERS TO INVOLVE

Who will be affected by any personal/organizational changes that result?

Who needs to approve any changes that result?

Who needs to be involved in the goal-setting process?

IV. ATTENDING

Specific materials/issues to discuss with session leader.
Questions that relate content to your own situation.

Related areas that aren't mentioned in the session description that I need to know about.

Note taking: Categorize according to learning objectives?
To on-the-job uses that occur to me during session? To potential ways of measuring results? To areas that require follow up?

Draft preliminary action plan during the session:

Write a brief summary.

V. BACK ON THE JOB

What I expect to do:

How I intend to measure results:

How changes fit in with long-term objectives:

TIPS ON ATTENDING

Building In Participation

If you find yourself in a session that fails to match your objectives (or offers unexpectedly irrelevant information), seasoned conference participants often suggest you try to increase your level of participation. Methods include, suggests Pat McLagan, asking questions, raising a problem or situation that has some relevance to your situation and suggesting that discussion groups (if that's part of the session) explore the real world implications of the information being presented.

Note-taking, jotting down related ideas that may be barely connected to the topic, promising yourself a reward if you manage to get some value from the session—all are ways to increase your participation at least on a mental level.

On a much simpler level, distractions, an uncomfortable room, preoccupations and fatigue can also reduce your ability to extract value from a session. Room temperature, sound and light levels, open doors, smoking in non-smoking sections—all are “under your control” if you simply speak up. As one *Training Directors' Forum Newsletter* reader notes of the physical discomfort that sometimes accompanies sessions, “Our students wouldn't stand for it. Why should we?”

Fatigue, often related to sitting for hours at a time or squeezing too many activities into the time at your disposal, is also controllable if you monitor yourself and take simple measures to relax. Try a spin around the expo floor as a good way to stretch your legs and get a needed break. Also, avoid heavy meals and try to get adequate sleep the night before.

Perhaps the simplest advice of all is to dress comfortably, and if a few hours in an expo is in your plans, wear shoes meant for walking.

Using the Experts as Personal Consultants

Even when a session works well, there are numerous ways to make it work even better. Try using the experts as personal consultants during the session, or afterwards, when they informally field questions. The technique involves analyzing the information being presented in

light of your own situation, and (without being too obtrusive) steering as much of the expertise being offered toward your own learning needs.

Prepare a list of questions or an inventory of needs before you enter the session. You know what the session is generally about—go one step further and decide what you need to know to make the session as relevant as possible to your own situation.

Also bring along any materials you use in your work that relate to the topic. If the session is on evaluation, for example, bring your evaluation forms. Compare them with the information you're receiving as the session unfolds; later discuss them with the session leader.

Finally, develop an action plan for putting the new learning into effect. Some participants like to do this before they leave the session room while their ideas are fresh. Others will wait until the evening or until a break later in the day. Some areas the plan could address include:

- *What will the session allow you to do that will have some impact on your job and organization?*
- *How does that compare with your learning objectives?*
- *What further resources or information do you need?*
- *Who needs to be involved and whose support will you have to solicit to implement change?*
- *How will you measure results?*
- *Finally, what's the first step and when will you take it?*

It's also a good idea to complete the sponsor's evaluation form at the end of every session and an overall conference evaluation if one is provided. It will help reinforce what you learned and give session leaders and the conference sponsor invaluable feedback for future events. Consider what you learn from your trainees' completed evaluations. The same principal applies with the conference sponsor.

Note-Taking and Managing Information

Structured note-taking that helps organize a presentation and reinforces those points immediately relating to learning objectives is one way to ensure that the session will have a tangible impact back on the job.

Many experts also suggest reviewing your notes soon

after a session and creating a one- or two-paragraph summary. Combined with an action plan developed during the session, a brief summary can help you jog your memory in the weeks and months ahead without the need to continually review notes or handouts.

Networking

Networking may be one of the most valuable aspects of a professional conference. Meeting your peers and discussing the issues being explored at a conference will ultimately reinforce what you learn. You'll get feedback on sessions you couldn't attend and get ideas for sessions to attend at future conferences.

Networking also provides an intelligence function—you'll learn what other organizations, both in and out of your industry, are doing and quite possibly see ways to make those strategies work for you. You'll also learn of career opportunities and ways to advance as a professional.

At the same time, one of the biggest laments conference sponsors hear is from participants who felt they didn't or couldn't take advantage of networking opportunities—people who were overwhelmed by the conference's size or felt they didn't know how to connect, particularly people new to the field or attending alone.

One possible solution is to approach networking in a deliberate and organized fashion. Build dedicated networking time into your schedule by going to sessions early and staying late, for example. If an attendee list is available from the conference sponsor, you might decide in advance who you want to meet based on organization names and job descriptions.

Also, ask yourself if you want to meet people in your own industry or those outside it. What can you learn from people outside your industry? You'll probably find such a perspective invaluable.

Some *Training Directors' Forum Newsletter* readers also suggest talking with at least one new person at each session, activity or social event you attend. You may want to develop and rehearse a cordial ice-breaking introduction—words that make you feel comfortable when introducing yourself to strangers. And, of course, bring lots of business cards to exchange with others.

MAKING THE MOST OF AN EXPO

An exposition of products and services is an extension of the conference learning environment. Since expos sometimes bring hundreds of vendors together under one roof, they can save you the equivalent of thousands of dollars in time, effort and preview fees.

That's especially true in human resources, where products are highly specialized and often customized to clients' needs—making it impossible to “shop around” at the retail level.

Taking Charge

Since expos are marketing and selling opportunities, some conference goers are intimidated by the expectation of intense sales pressure. While that occasionally happens, if you attend an expo wisely, you can turn the selling environment to your advantage by adopting a confident and assertive posture with exhibit personnel. Constantly redirect the conversation back to your specific needs, explaining that you're there to compare and explore solutions to clearly-stated problems.

But first you have to make some sense of the expo floor, where hundreds of exhibits, many using state-of-the-art audiovisuals, can present a dazzling and somewhat overwhelming scene.

The expo directory is your basic tool. It should contain a floor plan and a buyer's guide, or list of exhibitors grouped by specific products and services.

Know your objectives ahead of time and map out a schedule that allows you to explore product areas that are relevant to your personal and organizational needs over several subsequent visits to the expo floor. Don't try to do it all with one visit.

You may find several opportunities to save money on the expo floor. Frequently, exhibitors will discount products or offer other incentives. Expos that offer ongoing “film festivals” of human resources videotapes present an especially rewarding opportunity. Most video producers will charge a fee of between \$25-50 to preview one of their products back at your company. Larger expos may screen hundreds of the latest HR videos at no charge.

Expo Tips

A few tips and suggestions, culled from the Trade Show Bureau and other sources, for making the most of an expo include:

- Get advice from session leaders on who to see and what questions to ask. Faculty members are often familiar with the latest products and services. During or after a session, ask them which exhibitors within their specialties offer useful or innovative approaches to your particular needs and problems.
- Control the situation inside the exhibitors' booth. Explain your needs or problems and explain what an exhibitor's product must do to meet them. Describe your existing equipment or products. If possible, bring samples of what you currently use and compare them with an exhibitor's product, asking the exhibitor to point out benefits or differences.
- If possible, ask an exhibitor for a product demonstration that matches your application. Try to go beyond impressive pre-set product routines. See if an exhibitor can show you what a product will do just for you.
- Visit your current suppliers. You may deal on a day-to-day basis with your current suppliers' field representatives. An expo offers you the chance to talk with senior executives and technical support people about service, product development, pricing and other matters of concern to you.
- Visit your suppliers' competition. Expos offer you the opportunity to evaluate alternate sources without upsetting existing relationships. Compare the competition. Decide if you're making the right choices.
- Visit suppliers who can help your company in the future. If you have some idea of where your organization is heading, visit suppliers whose products and services relate to possible future needs. The informal setting of an expo offers you the chance to get an early start on implementing future plans.
- Expect the unexpected. Once you've mapped out a strategy that includes visiting those exhibitors who may be essential to your business now and in the future, set aside some time to take a relaxed walk around the rest of the expo area. Stop at any booth that looks interesting. You'll get a sense for what's happening in the human

resources field and quite possibly you'll make some unexpected discoveries. Watch the reactions of other attendees and listen to their comments. A good expo will be a microcosm of your field. It can represent an unparalleled opportunity for intelligence and information gathering.

■ If the conference offers pre-registration or advanced registration for expo attendance, do it. Most often, you'll receive information ahead of time about who will be exhibiting and what you can expect. You'll get a head start on planning.

■ Bring a lightweight, durable tote for carrying literature and other important information you pick up at the expo, and wear comfortable clothes and walking shoes.

BACK AT WORK

There are numerous ways to reinforce what you learn at conferences and ultimately implement changes and improvements. Many involve continuing the process that began in your conference planning stages.

Many *Training Directors' Forum Newsletter* readers suggest sorting through notes and handouts as soon after a conference ends as possible. The material and your plans for change will still be fresh.

You might also write a brief conference summary for your management, including those who were part of the planning/goal-setting process. Also, send whatever materials and information you promised to others during the planning stages. If your action plan needs revisions, do so soon after the conference is over.

Refer back to your action plan to gauge your progress and determine if the plan was realistic to begin with. If after a certain time, you've done nothing, "throw the plan out and chalk it up to experience," one newsletter reader advises, "instead of feeling like you failed."

Finally, your post-conference review should include one final component—planning for your next conference. Jot down ideas for taking better advantage of the experience again. *Training Directors' Forum Newsletter* readers report that upwards of 40 percent of the time they spend at conferences is not especially useful. With a little foresight, you can dramatically beat those averages.

A STATISTICAL PORTRAIT OF CONFERENCE ATTENDANCE IN THE HRD INDUSTRY

How many conferences do HRD professionals attend each year and why? What factors contribute to successful experiences? *Training Directors' Forum Newsletter* polled several hundred readers and came up with the following results. Respondents were managerial-level training professionals. The data is statistically valid and is an average picture of the human resources development field.

Number of conferences attended annually:

4 or more	16%
3 or more	22%
2	25%
1	28%
0	9%

The average is a little over 2 conferences a year, but 38% of HRD managers attend 3 or more conferences annually.

Ranking of factors that influence decisions to attend (percentages agreed or strongly agreed):

Specific sessions matched organizational needs	82%
Membership in sponsoring organization	73%
Well-known speakers and presenters	62%
Reputation of conference sponsor	58%
Specific sessions matched career objectives	55%

Factors that did not influence decision to attend (percentages disagreed or strongly disagreed):

Management recommended attendance	80%
Conference held in exciting city or location	80%

Should you prepare a conference participation plan?

Yes	51%
No or no opinion	49%

Should you review objectives with management?

Yes	70%
No or no opinion	30%

Should you review results with management?

Yes	87%
No	13%

Does conference literature generally explain content accurately?

Yes	72%
No	28%

Why conferences work (percentages agreed or strongly agreed):

Knowledge of speakers	89%
Speakers' presentation styles	86%
Networking opportunities	81%
Timeliness of information	79%
Quality of questions	74%
Comfortable facilities	74%

Why conferences do not work (percentages disagreed or strongly disagreed):

Speakers lacked useful knowledge	89%
Speakers presented poorly	83%
Sessions didn't follow descriptions	72%
Overcrowded, uncomfortable rooms	67%
Information wasn't relevant to jobs	55%

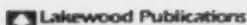
One final note:

When you attend an HRD conference be flexible and enjoy yourself. Many *Training Directors' Forum Newsletter* readers report that attending a successful conference leaves them newly motivated, recharged and refreshed. Informal networking and socializing opportunities provide especially useful opportunities to gain ideas, insight, inspiration—which may be the ultimate bottom line of any good professional conference. That may be difficult to plan for, but that's what you've got the right to expect.

Single copies of *The Training Directors' Forum Guide To Attending Conferences & Expos* are available at no charge; additional copies at 10 for \$5.00. Send check payable to Lakewood Publications to:

**Lakewood Publications
Attn: Lakewood Books
50 South Ninth Street
Minneapolis, MN 55402**

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